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**Montana Department of Commerce Awards Primary Sector  
Workforce Training Funds to Businesses in Helena, Missoula,  
Billings, Kalispell & Great Falls**

(HELENA) – Today Governor Brian Schweitzer announced the Montana Department of Commerce has awarded more than \$1 million in primary sector Workforce Training Grants (WTG) to Watkins Shepard Trucking, Inc. of Missoula, TeleTech of Kalispell, and Chinook Wireless of Great Falls.

Watkins Shepard Trucking, Inc. will receive \$315,000 in WTG funds, TeleTech will receive \$400,000 in WTG funds and Chinook Wireless will receive \$295,000 in WTG funds.

“Montana’s on the move,” said Governor Brian Schweitzer. “Montana’s business climate is one of the best in the nation, and these grants will continue to bolster that. They create business growth, more jobs, higher wages, and a stronger economy. All this means more opportunity for Montana.”

“The Workforce Training Grant Program is a solid economic investment because it makes money for the state,” said Commerce Director Anthony Preite. “Training grants not only create jobs and boost our economy; they put tax dollars into the General Fund and create millions of dollars of new, leveraged funds from private sector equity investments.”

At Governor Schweitzer’s request, the 60<sup>th</sup> Montana Legislature increased funding for WTG from \$1.4 million annually, to nearly \$4 million annually. The program is designed to help new businesses and those looking to expand. WTG is targeted toward businesses

that create at least one net, new job that pays at least the lower of the current county average or the current state average. That wage can include fringe benefits. New employees must work at least thirty-five hours per week year round. Program applicants must demonstrate that at least fifty percent of their sales originate outside of Montana. WTG is a reimbursable program, whereas applicants must fulfill their hiring and training obligations prior to accessing WTG funds. The maximum funding available to train a single employee is \$5,000.

All applications were approved by the Workforce Training Grant Application Review Committee, a statutory review committee, in the Department of Commerce. The six member committee evaluated and approved the proposals on September 28, 2007. Andy Poole, committee chairman and deputy director of the Montana Department of Commerce, said supporting these projects make good economic sense. "Private sector job creation of this magnitude is quite significant," said Poole. "The benefit businesses receive is reflected in a strong economy."

Watkins Shepard Trucking, Inc. is a trucking company with a nationwide network of 19 terminals including Missoula, Billings, and its corporate headquarters in Helena. The \$315,000 in funds provided by WTG would be used to train 63 new truck drivers over the next two years in a comprehensive driver program. The company currently employs approximately 1300 people, of whom 700 live in Montana.

Teletech is a global business process outsourcing (BPO) company which provides a full range of outsourced business solutions such as customer care and technical support. The company currently employs 380 people at the Kalispell facility. Officials plan to use the \$400,000 grant create an additional 80 jobs at the Kalispell facility over the next two years. Approximately 420 jobs will be in customer service, and about 40 will be created for administrative staff.

Chinook Wireless is a Montana telecommunications business, created in May of 2005 through the purchase of 3 Rivers Wireless, Blackfoot Wireless Communications and Summit Liquidating Trust. The company currently employs 114 people in accounting engineering, sales, marketing and customer service. Over the next two years the company plans to use its \$295,000 grant to hire and train 59 new employees under three categories—customer service, retail and engineering.

Since 2004, twelve WTG awards have been made and award funding has ranged from \$75,000 to \$1,955,000. Those awards have been leveraged with more than \$73 million in business investments. More than 1,500, good paying, new jobs have been created for Montana workers.

All WTG funds for fiscal year 2008 have not been awarded. Additional WTG funds are available.

Contact Nancy Guccione, WTG Program Manager, at 406-841-2744 or [nguccione@mt.gov](mailto:nguccione@mt.gov) for program specific questions.

Interested applicants can find guidelines and current and country average wage rates on the web at: <http://www.mtfinanceonline.com/WorkForceGrnts.asp>

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